

An Interview with
Gloria Gordon

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Gloria Gordon: ...Gloria Gordon.

Malaika Horne: Okay, and this project, as I've mentioned, is women as change agents and basically we're going to have a conversation with you about your life, your career and anything else you want to talk about. So, the first thing I want to start off asking you is about your family: your parents; your siblings; your husband; your children. Talk about that.

Gloria Gordon: I grew up on the East Coast. My parents were the children of immigrants from Poland who came, like, in the 1890's and my father's parents had a rural background and my mother's parents had an urban background. So when those parents came to this country, my grandparents, settled on the lower east side in New York City and the other settled in a very small village called Carmel, New York, about maybe 16 miles north of New York City. So I was born in White Plains, New York. That's where my father was from. His father had a livery stable on Main Street, rented horses to people. So I grew up with interests, both rural and urban, from these parents. I was born in 1923 and I have one sibling, my sister born two years later. I got married in 1946. I married Barry Commoner and we had two children. We still have them, although he died last year. My children, a daughter, Lucy, and a son, Fred, who both live on the East Coast. So my children are older adults. They are in their 60's.

Malaika Horne: And your parents names?

Gloria Gordon: Jean Pruzan was her maiden name and my father, Alison Gordon.

Malaika Horne: And your children's names?

Gloria Gordon: Lucy Alison Commoner and Fred Gordon Commoner.

Malaika Horne: And since Barry Commoner is so well known, could you just briefly tell us about him?

Gloria Gordon: Barry Commoner, a biologist, an author, a very early environmentalist, recognized as such and we got divorced after 30 years of marriage but while we were together, I worked with him, I was also very active in the nuclear information movement. It was a movement for scientists to explain to the public, what is a nuclear bomb; what happens when one explodes, and so on and so forth, and what is nuclear fallout. So that was a big part of my life while I was married.

- Malaika Horne: And he was at Washington University?
- Gloria Gordon: Yes, a professor. At that time, there was a Botany Department, when he was hired. He had been in the Navy during World War II and when he came out of the Navy several years later, we got married and he got his first job here in St. Louis at Washington University.
- Malaika Horne: So talk about your youth, anything about growing up. Describe it.
- Gloria Gordon: My youth...Well, we lived in a pleasant sort of new neighborhood of single family houses and children. We had a little neighborhood gang. My best friend, Bubsey, their back fence and our back fence, we had a little...her father made little steps to go over the fence and we had a little neighborhood gang. She was a very important person in my life. We had something called The Joy Club of maybe eight or ten kids where we did some things together: sold lemonade to send to the Tribune Fresh Air Fund. I don't know, it was probably a few dollars we sent.
- Malaika Horne: What was the name of that group again?
- Gloria Gordon: The Joy Club.
- Malaika Horne: And you sent funds to where?
- Gloria Gordon: There was a newspaper at that time called the Herald Tribune so the Tribune had a Fresh Air Fund in the summer.
- Malaika Horne: And what was that for?
- Gloria Gordon: For families to have some money for their children to get out of the slums in the city and get some fresh air, do something out of the city in the summer.
- Malaika Horne: And this girl who was very influential, what was her name?
- Gloria Gordon: Barbara Hartfield was her name and she was a year older than me and we all called her Bubsey.
- Malaika Horne: What did you find about her to be so influential?
- Gloria Gordon: Well, number one, she was a leader and I was sort of her assistant and Bubsey and I were close friends and later, when the women's movement started, much to my surprise, I found that women were being

encouraged to learn how to be close, how to be friends with other women and to me, that was something I learned early in my life in my relationship with Bubsey.

Malaika Horne: Elementary and secondary schools, had you attended anything that you'd like to share with us about that period in your life going to school?

Gloria Gordon: My sister and I both went to the public schools in White Plains, New York. There was a school six-tenths of a mile away from where we lived where we could walk to school. I think it was a very good school. The music teacher was an influential person in my life. That was in junior high. White Plains just had one high school where everyone came and, of course, this was New York State and there was no segregation in schools so there were people of color in my classes but in this school, I would say, there was a track system so, really, there were fewer diverse people in the college preparatory track throughout the high school. In high school, I was the editing news editor of the high school newspaper and that became a big part of my whole life, knowing how to write which I learned and I had a big crush on the high school journalism teacher.

Malaika Horne: When you were a child, what did you want to be...or did you think about that... when you grew up?

Gloria Gordon: No, I wasn't that clear about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I remember, maybe in about 7th or 8th grade, we were asked to write an essay about our career that we planned to have. So I really didn't know what but I was taking piano lessons and I wrote about becoming a concert pianist which I really did not intend to do.

Malaika Horne: So, you talked about being the editor of the high school newspaper?

Gloria Gordon: The news editor. I was a very good news editor.

Malaika Horne: And that sounds like a leadership position. Were you recognized as a leader in high school?

Gloria Gordon: No, I don't think I was. I was recognized as someone who could write so when the yearbook got in trouble, my class, when our yearbook, the editors, they were having a lot of trouble, they called me in to straighten things out but just as an editor. I was not socially any kind of leader at all.

Malaika Horne: Who encouraged you inside the home and who encouraged you outside the home too, for any reason?

Gloria Gordon: Well, inside the family, I got a lot of encouragement. My main source of encouragement, I would say, in general, was my grandmother. She totally doted on me, even all through college. She sent me cookies but she just adored me and it was mutual. So I had someone who just loved me. My mother was very sort of goal-oriented. Being a second generation person, her interest with my sister and me was to give us opportunities to sort of get ahead in life and she saw to it that we had a lot of lessons and classes like piano lessons, dance lessons, modern dance at that time was a big thing, and art lessons, belonged to the Girl Scouts. So I had a lot of exposure to things, and living that close to New York City, by the time I was old enough, certainly in high school, to get on the train by myself, I could go into New York City and go to concerts or theater. So I would say I had a very rich exposure to culture and also politics because this was the Depression. Now, we were economically okay in the Depression because my father's job, he had a place of business, an auto repair business. He sold auto parts also. So during the Depression, people didn't have enough money to buy new cars so we were never hungry during the Depression. I would say the influence on me, like, through high school, was the facts of the Depression: the strikes; the struggles of the economic situation in the country, and then, of course, Nazism and Fascism. I think I grew up during a very tumultuous time.

Malaika Horne: And that Depression started in 1929 and lasted until the Roosevelt Administration, is that correct?

Gloria Gordon: Yes.

Malaika Horne: So that was a long period for you, growing up.

Gloria Gordon: Yeah, I would say my whole childhood was influenced by the economic issues in this country and, by seeing Roosevelt start the New Deal and make changes...there's never been a president since Roosevelt that I considered to be my president. I mean, my president before Roosevelt, the president I admired was Abraham Lincoln and then I wasn't interested in anyone else until Franklin Roosevelt and I haven't been that interested in anyone since.

Malaika Horne: So, these are early influences, obviously.

Gloria Gordon: Yes.

Malaika Horne: Any other early influences?

Gloria Gordon: Well, I think that the other thing going on in our society was there was a lot of left-wing writing and protests. I think another influence was being aware of alternative views and that people could protest and workers could sit down in an auto factory and refuse to leave by working together. And another influence, I would say, during my childhood, was my awareness about being Jewish. My four grandparents were all Jewish, not religiously Jewish but culturally Jewish and at that time...of course, with Hitler, it was very dangerous to be Jewish but being Jewish in the era when I grew up was, we were definitely an oppressed group. It may not seem that way currently but at that time, there were quotas for going to college. There were very few college professors who were Jewish. When a college got their Jewish quota, they wouldn't take in anyone else who was Jewish. And property, if you were Jewish, there were restrictive covenants and so on. So I think being Jewish influenced me in that it gave me an outsider's view of society. I knew that I wasn't in the mainstream and I think it allowed me and encouraged me to see things independently.

Malaika Horne: So anti-Semitism was occurring in this country?

Gloria Gordon: Absolutely, yes.

Malaika Horne: What about now?

Gloria Gordon: Well, now, yeah, it's below the surface.

Malaika Horne: So most people aren't aware?

Gloria Gordon: Yeah. I would say the difference is, now, I belong to a synagogue. I am actually an atheist but my religion is really humanism. I think that human beings are the force that would have to make changes in the world but I think it's important to be connected with the Jewish community and I came to a certain stage of my life where I started telling people I'm Jewish and whatever. It was pretty much during the peace movement. Religion became important if you were a peace activist and I realized that I needed to be more connected and know what my roots are as a peace activist.

Malaika Horne: In your sub-culture?

Gloria Gordon: Yes, and I make a point for some decades now, I've made a point of that but up to a certain point in my life, even when I went to college, I did not say that I'm Jewish. If I heard an anti-Semitic remark, I just stayed away from those people but I didn't say, "Well, I'm Jewish and I don't want to hear that."

Malaika Horne: And, in fact, this is a good segue into college. What about your college years, any influences there? Did you have leadership positions in college?

Gloria Gordon: College was where I developed a leadership role. It was in my senior year but my influences in college were, I went to Oberlin College which has a pretty strong history of a progressive place so, because of the history of that college, and also, we had faculty that had escaped from Hitler and so there were faculty members who influenced me because of their background in Europe and so on. So I had sort of a social action influence there and academically, that's where I became a psychologist. I took a psychology class as a sophomore and I chose to major in psychology. The other thing about the social outlook at Oberlin that influenced me as a freshman, there was a division of the YWCA called the Student Industrial Division which actually got attacked for being too radical later, but I benefitted from it and students from Cleveland, we were a bus ride away from Cleveland, either we would go to Cleveland or workers...I said that wrong...workers from Cleveland who were either white or black, would come to Oberlin. We would have some activities or we would go there several times. So that was where I learned the negro national anthem and things like that.

Malaika Horne: So you learned a lot about black culture?

Gloria Gordon: Yes, not a lot but enough that it got me started. I was more connected with black culture but that happened as an elective, which I chose to get involved in because I had a positive push in that direction from my father who had a couple of black friends from childhood in this little town, Carmel, New York, and he would go and visit them and take my sister and me with him and they would sit around and talk and we would just listen and that would be one of the things he exposed us to. He didn't think anything of it. They worked at a race track and we went and visited them at the race track.

Malaika Horne: Do you think those kind of exposures early on are important for children in terms of their attitudes about race?

Gloria Gordon: Absolutely because otherwise...and I had two students in my class at school who were among the smart students...I was in with the smart students in grade school...and they were black. But meeting these two black men and seeing that they were just friendly, wonderful people, I think that's very important in my life.

Malaika Horne: You talked about the professors who, I guess, escaped from Nazi Germany. What jumped out at you? What impact...is there anything particular that they influenced you in any way?

Gloria Gordon: A broad canvas about political changes and about fascism and about the importance of struggle, the underground in Europe during the war, I think I was very influenced by knowing...I found out a lot about this a little later but the underground movement in Europe during the war became my standard of what people have to do to fight bad government things that are going bad in the society.

Malaika Horne: Very important. I want you to reflect for a minute. We ask each of our interviewees this question about: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what do you think you would have been doing? You might want to look at your grandmother if that helps. Either way, would you just be a housewife? What would you be doing if you were born 50 years earlier?

Gloria Gordon: I think my life could have been very different. I could have not gone to college because when my father died at the age of 50, I assumed I wouldn't be able to continue in college and my mother just said, "Gloria, you're going back to school. Pack up." I was working in his...she took over his business when he died. She didn't know one end of a car from the other but she was a very good business woman and I worked for her that summer. He died in the winter and I finished my semester of school and went home and I worked for her in the garage in the summer. I might have just married an auto mechanic and I don't know what would have happened and I might have lived in the country. Maybe I would have been a suffragette. That could have happened.

Malaika Horne: You graduated from Oberlin?

Gloria Gordon: Yeah.

- Malaika Horne: Did you go beyond that, and you had a degree in psychology?
- Gloria Gordon: Yes, I graduated with a major in psychology and then I also graduated with several letters of reference from a speaker who had come to campus as part of a program that I was the leader in in my senior year and I went to New York and met the student director of the CIO Political Action Committee that was working for Roosevelt. I graduated in 1944 and Roosevelt was working for re-election at that time. So that was my first job. She hired me to be the coordinator of a rally for Roosevelt called (Young People?) for Roosevelt. It was a rally in Carnegie Hall in 1944 and I ran that rally. We had overflow crowd, mounted police out on the street, on 57th street, loud speakers and it was very dramatic. So that was my first job.
- Malaika Horne: And who hired you?
- Gloria Gordon: I think my salary, such as it was, came from the Political Action Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.
- Malaika Horne: I thought you said a woman hired you?
- Gloria Gordon: Yes, Trudy Kingdon, Behrle. She was the head of the student division of the CIO.
- Malaika Horne: And you said it was an overflow crowd. How many people attended that?
- Gloria Gordon: Carnegie Hall was filled. I don't know how many people.
- Malaika Horne: It must have been thousands, I would think.
- Gloria Gordon: I guess.
- Malaika Horne: So that was a really successful program right off the bat.
- Gloria Gordon: Yes, and it was co-sponsored by four different young people's organizations and one of those organizations that co-sponsored that rally then hired me as their executive secretary, and that was the United States Student Assembly. So I was then the executive director of that organization for a year or two and I just burned out on the student movement but that exposed me. But Eleanor Roosevelt was interested in this organization. We once had a little meeting at her house.
- Malaika Horne: So you met her?

- Gloria Gordon: I met her.
- Malaika Horne: Oh, tell us about Eleanor Roosevelt.
- Gloria Gordon: Well, she was a hero of mine. Actually, my mother greatly admired Eleanor Roosevelt also. And the way she continued with her independent career after Franklin Roosevelt died was very impressive to me, her role at the U.N.
- Malaika Horne: So, do you think she influenced you as well?
- Gloria Gordon: I think just seeing a woman doing all of that definitely influenced me. There was a female journalist at that time called Dorothy Thompson who wrote a daily column. I think that influenced me.
- Malaika Horne: In Washington? Where does she write the column?
- Gloria Gordon: I'm not sure. It could have been Washington or New York.
- Malaika Horne: When you said you met Eleanor Roosevelt at her house, which home were you talking about?
- Gloria Gordon: In Washington Square, she had an apartment in New York and one of the people who started the United States Student Assembly was Joseph Lash who later wrote a biography of the Roosevelt's, but that was the connection with Eleanor Roosevelt.
- Malaika Horne: So, if you can recall when you met her and you were with a group at her house, what did you all do? What did you talk about?
- Gloria Gordon: I don't remember what we talked about but it was about something we were doing for social change. It was a political meeting.
- Malaika Horne: Talk about your life and your career, anything else about who influenced you. Just give us an idea about your career.
- Gloria Gordon: Well, my career was...I think there's a unique number of women my age who had unique careers because the women's movement came along while we were in midlife and older. So I went back to school and got a Ph.D. at the age of 49 and there were other women like myself in academia who went back to school and got a Ph.D. I had gotten a Master's Degree pretty soon after I got married. I had been influenced to do that by a woman who came to the Oberlin campus and advised us

women to get an advanced degree before having children and I followed her advice. So I got a Master's Degree, actually got it, like, a couple of months before my daughter was born.

Malaika Horne: And that was in what?

Gloria Gordon: My daughter was born in 1950.

Malaika Horne: And your Master's Degree was in?

Gloria Gordon: Probably '49, Washington University...

Malaika Horne: The discipline?

Gloria Gordon: Psychology.

Malaika Horne: And your Ph.D. is also in psychology?

Gloria Gordon: Yes, and that Master's Degree was a study that I should have published but no one told me I should publish it. It was a study showing how racism affects the ability of white people to learn things about people of color.

Malaika Horne: Interesting. What about your dissertation? What was that about?

Gloria Gordon: That was less interesting. I got my Ph.D. in 1949. I was studying the way different theoretical perspectives among psychologists affect their interpretation of data. I'm very interested in how people see things and how we have biases and points of view that keep us from seeing reality clearly.

Malaika Horne: Going back to your Master's, which you said was more interesting. What are some of the barriers to racism that keep white people from understanding another culture, black culture or whatever?

Gloria Gordon: Well, I did this as an experimental thing. I cut up my high school yearbook and I got out pictures of black people and white people and I made some slides that I displayed to classrooms that I got access to where all the students were white at that time at Washington University, amazingly, still, and I just put a few little lines under each picture: the person's name, their Grade Point Average, and they wanted a phrase about them, something like that, and I exposed these slides for, like, a minute or so to this class full of people and then asked them to...on other sheets of

paper, they had to write down what it said under each person's name so I could show that they couldn't learn it when the faces were black.

Malaika Horne: Interesting.

Gloria Gordon: And I also gave them an attitude questionnaire that always existed, a test that had been validated that detected their attitude toward people of color.

Malaika Horne: So if the photo was black and the information was underneath it, they couldn't remember it if the photo was black? Is that what you're saying?

Gloria Gordon: Right, they could not remember it as well as when the photos were white and I mixed up the pictures with what it said under them in one class. This is what it said under the white and black pictures; in another class, it would be the opposite. So I showed that it wasn't that it was harder to learn the text; it was just that the picture was different.

Malaika Horne: That should have been published.

Gloria Gordon: And I think it's the only study of its kind that's ever been done.

Malaika Horne: And it helps me to understand ethnocentrism. There's a concept called ethnocentrism. That hits it on the head for me. So, let's move on to a topic or an issue that women face whether they work or not but particularly when they work. It's called work life balance. When you were maybe with children and husband and working, how did you balance all that?

Gloria Gordon: Well, the first thing I'll say is that when my children were small, I had decided that I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom so I didn't have that when they were small. I'm just in awe of how women can do that. I think how to balance it even later, I don't think I ever did a very good job of balancing whatever I was currently absorbed in. It might have been a job but it might have been a movement. I was so active in the peace movement and in nuclear issues. My children didn't have my full attention a lot of the time and my husband was very absorbed in similar stuff so I would say it was very hard to keep our family in balance. We were able to get away and go places at times. So it was a challenge. I had a tendency to get overly absorbed in something that I'm doing and not keep everything else in balance.

Malaika Horne: So you were a stay-at-home mom but you were an activist so you were actually working?

Gloria Gordon: I was working in various ways while they were at home.

Malaika Horne: Moving on to more information about leadership, what were some of your leadership lessons? What did you learn about when you were in leadership positions that were important to you to understand?

Gloria Gordon: I learned that what suits me in a leadership role is to be working with a team. There are some people who just want to stand up at a microphone and go from there and so on, but that's not my style and I learned to appreciate the value of team work and how hard it is and how to avoid burn-out or some things that is good to do to avoid burn-out, the importance of supporting one another in doing activism leadership work. Actually, I got involved in a movement. In the '60s, there was a lot of change and social movements, including like a self-help movement. So I got involved in an organization called Re-Evaluation Counseling, sometimes called Co-Counseling and I learned a great deal from that about leadership, how to listen to other people, how people can put their heads together and hear from everyone. So I learned some things through that movement.

Malaika Horne: Just as an aside, did you ever work as a psychologist?

Gloria Gordon: Yes.

Malaika Horne: Where was this and when?

Gloria Gordon: I have done teaching and I have done research and my research, I had two big projects that I did during the 15 years of my career, between getting my Ph.D. at the age of 49, and retiring at 65. I worked on a research project to study the lives of shift workers. It was a study...I got an NIMH fellowship to interview workers who were involved in a sleep laboratory study that was being done by a colleague at St. Louis University in the Psychology Department. So I interviewed those people about their lives.

Malaika Horne: NIMH is the National Institute of Mental Health?

Gloria Gordon: National Institute of Mental Health. They had funding there for post-doctoral fellowships and I was able to get one. And then, I did that here

in St. Louis. Then I went to New York and I had a position at the School of Public Health at Columbia University. I was there for three years and that was a study. A writer, her name is Jean Stelman, wrote a book called *Work is Dangerous to your Health* and she started something called the Women's Occupational Health Resource Center at Columbia University in the School of Public Health and she got a grant to study the lives of clerical workers in big open offices, workers that were doing routine work where the work doesn't even make sense. You just have to transfer numbers from here to there and they were working on, at the time it was called "video display terminals." So I was the director of that research study and I went to several sites in this country and Canada and we worked through labor unions to interview and give questionnaires to workers on the effects of workplace conditions on them. I am one of the few people in this country that went into the field of occupational stress from the hourly workers' point of view, not from the executives' point of view.

Malaika Horne: Interesting. So I want to just make sure that we knew about that and you were talking earlier about leadership lessons. How would you describe your leadership style?

Gloria Gordon: It's very much team work, yes, and I tried to start a co-housing community in St. Louis and it didn't come together. It's a hard thing to do but my team was not large enough and resourced enough. So I learned a lot from that. So I would say my biggest leadership success has been starting STL Village and there, there's been a terrific team that I've worked with.

Malaika Horne: Talk a little bit more about STL Village.

Gloria Gordon: STL Village, we started it in St. Louis using the model of a so-called village for aging in place, people who want to live at home and get whatever help they need to live at home and not go to a different place where they're being taken care of or go someplace where their children can take care of them, but you do need some extra help as you get older. So a village is a place where...this model of a so-called village was developed in Boston. Beacon Hill Village was the very first village and that has taken off around the country. There are now 200 of these villages. So it was my idea to bring this village movement to St. Louis because at that time when I raised this idea, which was in 2011, there were only villages on

the East Coast and the West Coast and there was one in Chicago. So what I did, the very first thing I did was to get hold of four friends and say, "Let's sit down and talk about this." Then they started having ideas and then we found more people and one of them introduced me to Arthur Culvert who she had met on a sidewalk somewhere and Arthur and I made very good leaders of a team because we have different things we're good at, we complement each other and we get along well; we like each other a lot. So that's how it worked as a team. I could not have started STL Village as a single leader.

Malaika Horne: And you mentioned earlier, a group, co-housing?

Gloria Gordon: Yes.

Malaika Horne: What was that?

Gloria Gordon: That's a different model. It comes from Scandinavia, Denmark and there's a book that was written about it called *Co-Housing* and that is people who actually live in the same...you move together and live into either an existing building or you build houses or apartments that you're going to live in together as an intentional community.

Malaika Horne: And these are older adults?

Gloria Gordon: No, co-housing is for people of all ages and children and everything.

Malaika Horne: So the idea is to support each other, to make living conditions and life a little easier, is that the purpose?

Gloria Gordon: Yes. It's not income sharing. There were...I forget what they're called, when people would get together during the '60s and share income...communists...it was to take a little bit of what communism is like and a little bit of what independent living is like and do a compromise in the middle where you're living in your own space, you have your own kitchen and your own bathroom but there is also communal space and you eat together at times that you decide you're going to eat together and you become also very active with all the children who are there and you're just being a so-called intentional community through a lot of meetings, decide everything together.

- Malaika Horne: So back to STL Village, one of the components is aging in community, as you said, but also that volunteers will take older adults to the grocery store, to the pharmacist, to the bank, to the doctor, is that correct?
- Gloria Gordon: Correct.
- Malaika Horne: And then you also have the social part, the social component.
- Gloria Gordon: Mm-hmm, activities, things to do together and a general attitude that the second half of life is not all downhill. It's liberation from ageism, is what it is.
- Malaika Horne: I love that, liberation from ageism. So, getting back to you saying that you could not have started STL Village without Arthur Culbert. What's the difference between...and you don't have to use Arthur; I know Arthur too...between what you think, how women lead and how men lead. Have you noticed any differences?
- Gloria Gordon: I have. I think working together does come more and change does come more easily for women. Men are likely...especially in my age range...Arthur is younger. I don't know, I guess he's maybe 20 years younger than I am, I'm not sure...but even now, I think men are more likely to have been in executive positions and in charge of everything and feel their power. They have a more comfortable sense of power and capacity, I think. I think we still have a lot of sexism in this country.
- Malaika Horne: And how is it played out, do you think? How does sexism occur? How do you see that? What is sexism?
- Gloria Gordon: Sexism is a mistaken understanding left over from the Stone Age that you have to be strong enough to take a club and go and hit and lion on the head in order to be in charge of something. It's left over from the part of our brains that is down in there somewhere. Sometimes I think that some of it is testosterone, that men have more of this push to get out there and conquer. I think if this planet is going to survive, I think women are going to have to take over.
- Malaika Horne: I agree. Based on being a woman or a human being, what has impeded your progress?
- Gloria Gordon: I would say feeling confident, sort of feeling strong enough, confident enough, assertive enough. I see those things in younger women now but

for women of my age, all of my formative years with society; really, women were just a little behind the scenes there.

Malaika Horne: Any other challenges? Being a person who I would consider goal-driven and a high achiever, did anything get in your way besides what you've already spoken about?

Gloria Gordon: Well, for me personally, I think something that makes it difficult is that I need a lot of support. I'm a person who needs a lot of support. I need to have a lot of connection. The fact that my marriage didn't last for 60 years; it only lasted for 30 years, was because my husband wasn't paying that much attention to me. He was just very busy with his career and so on. I need more sense of community and support and so on to be who I am.

Malaika Horne: So we have about five minutes and I have so many other questions. Let me ask you this one, which I think is a good one: In terms of protégés, mentees as they call them, what do you look for in younger people in terms of their leadership potential? What do you see in them?

Gloria Gordon: Well, I'll take my granddaughter as an example. What I see in her is just amazing. She is adventuresome. She went to an employer and told them that they needed...it was a yoga studio and she said, "You need a business manager here" and she handed them a description of what that job would look like and how much they should pay and she said she'd be willing to do it. Then they said, "Okay, we'll hire you" and then she was also working part-time at another yoga studio and she went to the other one which she liked better and said, "Okay, the first one said yes..." "Are you interested? Yes, we'll meet whatever they did." So that kind of initiative and ability, what I look for is an ability to take care of their health, to understand how to be healthy, physically healthy.

Malaika Horne: How old is your granddaughter?

Gloria Gordon: She's 25.

Malaika Horne: What's her name?

Gloria Gordon: Olivia.

Malaika Horne: If there was one message that you'd like to convey to women about, particularly leadership, but anything, what would it be?

Gloria Gordon 12-8-2015

Gloria Gordon: That it's very important to have a support gang for yourself. Don't think that that means you're weak; no, just a gang of people who are going to support you.

Malaika Horne: A support gang? I love that. Any hobbies?

Gloria Gordon: I write poetry; I like to go out in the country, look at the night sky, look at the constellations.

Malaika Horne: And finally, any recognitions, awards, anything of late?

Gloria Gordon: Well, I was given an award this year by the Central West End Association as a founder, really co-founder but of STL Village. It's an award, the POLK Award, that they give every year to someone who does something for the neighborhood.

Malaika Horne: Congratulations.

Gloria Gordon: Thank you.

Malaika Horne: Thank you.